

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 DHA-02 SAM-01 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

/062 W

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R 101118Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY LISBON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5964

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LISBON 895

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINS, PO

SUBJ: PROGRESS ON POLITICAL PRISONER QUESTION

REF: (A) 75 LISBON 7635 (DTG 241226Z DEC 75), (B) LISBON 486

(DTG 221808Z JAN 76)

SUMMARY: IN ORDER TO DEPRIVE LEFT OF PRIME TARGET OF OPPORTUNITY, GOP IS MOVING EXPEDITIOUSLY TO RESOLVE POLITICAL PRISONER PROBLEM. LEFTIST EFFORTS TO GENERATE PUBLIC OUTCRY OVER PRISONER ISSUE HAVE PROVEN UNSUCCESSFUL. END SUMMARY.

1. EFFORT BEGUN BY GOP TO EXPEDITE CASES OF PRE-NOV 25 POLITICAL PRISONERS HAS MAINTAINED MOMENTUM (REF A). MANY OF THESE PRISONERS, WHO INCLUDE FORMER HOLDERS OF HIGH POSITIONS
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IN SALAZAR/CAETANO REGIMES, MEMBERS OF FORMER POLITICAL POLICE

(PIDE/DGS), AND CONSERVATIVE MILITARY OFFICERS ARRESTED FOLLOWING SEPT 28, 1974 EVENTS AND MARCH 11, 1975 ABORTIVE RIGHT WING COUP, HAVE ALREADY BEEN FREED FOR LACK OF EVIDENCE.

-- GOP ANNOUNCED JAN 18 THAT OVER 300 FORMER EMPLOYEES OF PRIDE HAD BEEN RELEASED SINCE COUP, BUT THAT OVER 1,000 REMAINED IN JAIL;

-- SUCH KEY FORMER REGIME FIGURES AS GEN KAULZA DE ARRIAGA (REF B); EX-INTERIOR MINISTERS CESAR MOREIRA DE BAPTISTA, GEN ARNALDO SCHULTZ, AND ALREDO DOS SANTOS JUNIOR; AND FORMER POLICE CHIEF CPT MALTES SOARES, HAVE BEEN REELASED SINCE JAN 16;

-- LAST OF CIVILIANS DETAINED FOLLOWING MARCH 11 COUP ATTEMPT WERE RELEASED JAN 22. LISBON PRESS REPORTED JAN 23 THAT ONLY FOUR HIGH-RANKING MILITARY OFFICERS REMAINED UNDER DETENTION FOR THEIR MARCH 11 ROLES.

2. MOST OF THOSE RELEASED REMAIN ON BAIL OR UNDER FIXED RESIDENCE REQUIREMENTS AND MAY STILL BE BROUGHT TO TRIAL. MANY, HOWEVER, INCLUDING ARRIAGA, HAVE BEEN FREED WITHOUT CONDITIONS. EVEN THOSE WHO REMAIN IN PRISON HAVE REASON TO EXPECT PROMPT ACTION ON THEIR CASES, HOWEVER. REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL SPOKESMAN CPT SOUSA E CASTRO ANNOUNCED IN MID-JANUARY THAT CHARGES AGAINST FORMER POLITICAL POLICE WOULD FINALLY BE BROUGHT BY END OF FEBRUARY; ON JAN 26 HE SAID THAT FIRST FILES ON MARCH 11 DETAINEES WERE BEING TURNED OVER TO JUDICIAL AUTHORITIES SAME DAY.

3. LEFTIST PRISONERS: GOVERNMENT HAS MADE GOOD ON ITS PROMISES OF PROMPT ACTION IN CASES OF LEFTIST MILITARY AND CIVILIANS DETAINED FOLLOWING ABORTIVE NOV 25 COUP. JAN 20 RELEASE OF OFFICIAL REPORT ON COUP WAS FIRST STEP IN PROCESS. ITS FINDINGS AND ANY FUTURE DISCOVERIES OF ONGOING INVESTIGATIONS WILL SERVE AS BASIS FOR ANY FORMAL CHARGES WHICH MAY BE BROUGHT AGAINST PRISONERS. GOVERNMENT HAS ALSO ACTED TO SILENCE LEFTIST CHARGES OF ILLEGAL AND INHUMAN TREATMENT OF DETAINEES. BETWEEN 20 AND 30 "REVOLUTIONARY" PRISONERS HAVE ALREADY BEEN RELEASED FOR LACK OF EVIDENCE. OTHERS HAVE BEEN TRANSFERRED TO MORE COMFORTABLE QUARTERS,
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WHILE FAMILY VISITING PRIVILEGES HAVE BEEN EXTENDED TO ALL. ON JAN 27, PRISONERS WERE ALLOWED TO CONSULT WITH LAWYERS FOR FIRST TIME. IN COMMENTS TO REPORTERS SAME DAY, SOUSA E CASTRO RAISED POSSIBILITY THAT SOME NOV 25 DETAINEES MIGHT BE RELEASED IN NEAR FUTURE.

4. AGITATION CONTINUES: GOP REDRESS OF PRISONER COMPLAINTS, HOWEVER, HAS DONE NOTHING TO DAMPEN LEFTIST AGITATION TO FREE

PRISONERS. UNBRELLA ORGANIZATION FOR FREE-THE-PRISONERS CAMPAIGN, "COMMITTEE FOR LIBERATION OF ANTI-FASCIST AND REVOLUTIONARY PRISONERS" (CLARP), WAS FORMED JAN 12 TO COORDINATE EFFORTS. THROUGH SUCH MEANS AS CAMPAIGN TO COLLECT ONE MILLION SIGNATURES ON PETITION DEMANDING PRISONERS' RELEASE, IT HAS SOUGHT TO FOCUS NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION ON PRISONER ISSUE. ISSUE HAS ALSO BEEN MAIN THEME IN SEVERAL FAR LEFT AND COMMUNIST SPONSORED ANTI-GOVERNMENT DEMONSTRATIONS, NOTABLY THOSE OF JAN 16 AND 17.

5. OTELO A SYMBOL: SINCE HIS DETENTION JAN 20, FORMER COPCON HEAD OTELO CARVALHO HAS BECOME A SYMBOL FOR LEFTIST EFFORTS TO FREE REVOLUTIONARY PRISONERS. POSTERS BEARING HIS IMAGE AND CALLING FOR PRISONERS' RELEASE HAVE BEEN PLASTERED ON WALLS THROUGHOUT LISBON. PERSISTANT RUMORS HAVE MEANWHILE CIRCULATED THAT HE IS REFUSING CONDITIONAL RELEASE UNTIL ALL OTHER NOV 25 DETAINEES ARE SET FREE. GOVERNMENT HAS DENIED SUCH REPORTS.

6. INQUIRIES: TWO RELATED DEVELOPMENTS ALSO DEMONSTRATED GOVERNMENT'S DETERMINATION TO MEET PRISONER PROBLEM SQUARELY:

-- ABUSE COMMISSION: ON JAN 26 PRESIDENT SWORE IN COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO CHARGES OF PRISONER ABUSE PRIOR TO NOV 25. ACTION WAS PROMPTED BY PERSISTENT REPORTS SINCE ABORTIVE COUP OF TORTURE AND "MENTAL HARASSMENT" OF PRISONERS BY LEFTIST GUARDS. COMMISSION BEGAN OPERATIONS SAME DAY WITH CALL OF VICTIMS OF ABUSE TO NOTIFY COMMISSION.

-- JAN 1 INCIDENT COMMISSION: MINISTRY OF INTERNAL ADMINISTRATION COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO DEMONSTRATIONS JAN 1 OUTSIDE OPORTO'S CUSTOIAS PRISON, IN WHICH FOURN PERSONS LOST THEIR LIVES IN CLASH WITH NATIONAL GUARDSMEN, RELEASED PRELIMINARY FINDINGS JAN 26. REPORT EXPECTEDLY REFUSED TO ATTRIBUTE RESPONSIBILITY FOR CONFIDENTIAL

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SLAYINGS TO GUARDSMEN, NOTING THAT AUTOMATIC WEAPONS OF TYPE THAT KILLED VICTIMS HAD BEEN SEEN AMONG CROWD PRIOR TO SHOOTINGS. CLARP EXPECTEDLY HAS REJECTED COMMISSION'S FINDINGS.

7. COMMENT: CONSCIENTIOUS AND ENERGETIC ATTENTION BEING GIVEN PRISONER ISSUE BY GOVERNMENT CONTRASTS SHARPLY WITH DILATORY TREATMENT AFFORDED PRISONERS PRIOR TO NOV 25. FOLLOWING HIS RELEASE, FORMER INTERNAL MINISTER MOREIRA BAPTISTA SAID HE HAD NOT EVEN BEEN QUESTIONED UNTIL WEEK BEFORE HE WAS FREED. LEFT HAS NOT BEEN SUCCESSFUL TO DATE IN GENERATING MAJOR PUBLIC OUTCRY OVER IMPRISONMENT OF LEFTISTS. EVEN EFFORTS TO USE OTELO HAVE NOT PRODUCED ANY NOTABLE RESPONSE.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL PRISONERS, PRISONERS RELEASE
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 10 FEB 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: coburnhl
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976LISBON00895
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760050-0522
From: LISBON
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760264/aaaacejv.tel
Line Count: 167
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 LISBON 7635, 76 LISBON 486
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: coburnhl
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 02 FEB 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <02 FEB 2004 by morefirh>; APPROVED <11 AUG 2004 by coburnhl>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PROGRESS ON POLITICAL PRISONER QUESTION
TAGS: PINT, PINS, PO
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006